



**WASHINGTON BUREAU**  
**NATIONAL ASSOCIATION FOR THE ADVANCEMENT OF COLORED PEOPLE**  
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August 11, 2004

Chairman Michael K. Powell  
Federal Communications Commission  
445 12th Street SW  
Washington, DC 20554

Re: MB Docket No: 04-207

Dear Chairman Powell:

I am writing to express my concerns regarding a legislative proposal that would require the cable and satellite industries to implement so-called "a la carte" channel offerings. With more than 500,000 card-carrying members within our association of more than 2,200 membership units covering all 50 states, the District of Columbia, Japan, Korea, Italy and Germany – the NAACP's principal objective is to ensure the political, educational, social and economic equality for racial and ethnic minority groups of the United States and to eliminate race prejudice.

It is quite troubling to find that this benign sounding measure may well have the unintended consequence of dramatically reducing the already under-represented diversity of cable and satellite programs targeting racial and ethnic minority audiences, while possibly increasing subscription costs to consumers. The "A la Carte" Distribution of Program Services proposal, now being considered on Capitol Hill, would require programming channels aimed at small but significant minority segments of the population to be sold on a channel-by-channel basis, a radical departure from the program packaging system used by cable and satellite companies now. As Alfred Liggins, Chairman of the newly launched "TV One" (a cable network which targets African-American adults and others) noted in the April 12, 2004 edition of The Washington Times, "Forcing cable and satellite companies to sell channels a la carte

would instantly erode [TV One's] potential advertising support, causing dramatic increases in the per-subscriber fee [it] must charge."

If an "a la carte" requirement is enacted, programming channels aimed at small but significant minority segments of the population would be threatened. This is especially true of programming intended for racial and ethnic minority or foreign language audiences such as BET, MBC, Univisión, TV One and S!TV, among others. Having to market each individual channel to each individual consumer would add huge costs. Smaller potential audiences will mean fewer advertising dollars, so these networks would be required to raise fees dramatically to cable and satellite operators. Not only would minority and ethnic programming be threatened, but other niche channels aimed at women (Lifetime Entertainment), science fiction, history or food enthusiasts (Sci-Fi Channel, History Channel and Food Network), would not be able to draw sufficient advertising dollars to help keep cable and satellite television subscription services accessible to consumers.

As such, I strongly urge the FCC to carefully examine alternatives that would spur greater diversity in ownership as well as content in the emerging digital cable, broadcasting, and satellite markets, rather than create a solution in search of a problem, as this so called "a la carte" proposal seems to be.

If there is anything I can do to help advance this process, I can be reached by telephone at (202) 338-2269.

Sincerely,



Hilary G. Shelton  
Director